

# CONNECTION

SUMMER 2023



Telecommunications  
Access of Maryland

PROGRAMS:



**Maryland Relay**

*Dial 7-1-1*

*A service for Marylanders who have difficulty using a standard telephone.*



**Maryland Accessible  
Telecommunications**

*Equipment Distribution Program*

*This program provides accessible telecommunications equipment for Maryland residents ages three and older who are Deaf, hard of hearing, DeafBlind, or are living with limited speech, mobility, or cognitive abilities.*

**MDRelay.org**  
**MDMAT.org**

**Meet TAM's newest  
team member!**

*Learn more on page 2.*

**Could you benefit  
from Relay Conference  
Captioning (RCC)?**

*See the full story on page 8.*

## Honoring Telecommunications Access of Maryland's (TAM) First Director, Willis Mann

**Willis Joel Mann**  
1940-2023



Please join the TAM team as we honor the late Willis Mann, the first director of TAM and one of the trailblazers who helped found Maryland Relay. Willis passed away on Friday, March 31, 2023, at the age of 82.

During his lifetime, Willis was dedicated to supporting and serving the Deaf community in many impactful ways. This life goal began after he earned a bachelor's degree in English from Gallaudet University in 1967 and then a master's degree in vocational rehabilitation from the University of Maryland in 1969. He even returned to Gallaudet University later in life to serve as an adjunct professor of public speaking.

In addition to working at Gallaudet University, Willis served as the first director of Northern California's Sacramento Relay program and then the first executive director of the NorCal Center on Deafness (now NorCal Services for Deaf and Hard of Hearing). He then left the State of California

*Continued on page 2* ▶



*Willis Mann, top row and far left, with Brenda Kelly-Frey, Gil Becker, Senator Thomas Mike Miller, Jr., Governor Parris Glendening, and more.*

## *Honoring Telecommunications Access of Maryland's (TAM) First Director, Willis Mann, continued*

to come to the State of Maryland to interview for the TAM director role in 1988, when it was known as the Telecommunications for Disabled Individuals Program. Willis was chosen out of 28 applicants, and he quickly began his mission to help launch TAM and MRS, which is now known as Maryland Relay, to the public—providing Marylanders who are Deaf and hard of hearing with the ability to communicate over the phone.

*Willis Mann celebrating one year of Maryland Relay.*



Willis is survived by his wife of 56 years, Jackie, and their children Erik Robert and Kristin Todd Mann, grandson Gavin Foster Mann, sister Shirley Kaczmark of Cloquet, Minnesota, and brother Paul Mann of Lakeville, Minnesota. He was preceded in death by his parents, his sister, and his brother.

*Willis Mann, first row and second from the left, along with Gil Becker, Curtis Humphries, Brenda Kelly-Frey, and more at the original Sprint Relay call center.*



**To honor Willis and his cherished legacy, individuals are invited to donate to Gallaudet University in his memory. Please visit [Gallaudet.edu/Giving](https://Gallaudet.edu/Giving) for more information.**

## **TAM Welcomes a New Administrative Assistant**

If you visit TAM's headquarters, there's a good chance you'll be greeted by our newest team member, Brandie Callender. As our new administrative assistant, Brandie is responsible for answering and directing all phone calls, receiving and filing all equipment applications for the MAT program, following up with MAT applicants regarding their applications, sending assigned equipment to clients, assisting TAM team members with office requests, and more.

Brandie is a Towson University graduate who majored in Deaf Studies, and she's spent over eight years working with the Deaf community and individuals with developmental disabilities as a case manager. When she's not at work, you can find Brandie traveling, going to concerts, crocheting, reading, and spending time with her husband and cats. Welcome to TAM, Brandie!



**Get acquainted with the TAM staff! Visit [DoIT.Maryland.gov/MDRelay/Pages/Staff.aspx](https://DoIT.Maryland.gov/MDRelay/Pages/Staff.aspx) to learn more about each individual and their respective roles.**



## Helping MAT Customers Find Solutions That Meet Their Needs

This spring, MAT Evaluator Brenda Bush shared a touching story with the TAM team that truly captures why the MAT program is such a beneficial resource for Marylanders who depend on assistive telecommunications equipment to make and receive calls.

“On April 12, I spent most of the day programming a RAZ Memory Cell Phone for a client with low vision and speech difficulties. This device is not just for people with memory loss—it can be used by people who have low vision and want to make limited calls. This particular device was loaned to the client because he has macular

degeneration and he only needs a phone to contact his wife, son, daughter, and 9-1-1.

When I delivered the phone, we sat together and tested all of the buttons, practiced using Speech-to-Speech, and made a call to 9-1-1 to ensure operators knew the client has speech difficulties. After helping the client, I showed his wife an app called Seeing AI—which voices content that’s captured by a phone’s camera—and helped her download it onto her iPhone. The client’s wife began to cry because she was so happy that her husband can now be independent with his own phone.”

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*“The client’s wife began to cry because she was so happy that her husband can now be independent with his own phone.”*

**Brenda Bush, MAT Evaluator**

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**SHARE  
YOUR  
STORY**

**If your life has been positively impacted by assistive equipment loaned to you through the MAT program, we want to know!  
E-mail us at [MAT.Program1@Maryland.gov](mailto:MAT.Program1@Maryland.gov) to share your story.**



Jane Hager, MAT Specialist, Kevin Steffy, MAT Manager, and interpreter Gavin Gobble Baker join DelmarvaLife.

## Leaders of the Maryland Accessible Telecommunications (MAT) Program Visit DelmarvaLife

If you tuned into DelmarvaLife on the morning of March 22, 2023, you might have recognized two familiar faces who appeared on the show. MAT Manager Kevin Steffy and MAT Specialist Jane Hager joined for a special segment on the Salisbury television program, that airs daily on WBOC, to share updates on how the MAT program is working to keep people better connected.

“It was a pleasure to share what we do at MAT with DelmarvaLife and its viewers,” shares Kevin. “Day-to-day communication looks different for everyone, and we’re doing our part to ensure people who have difficulty using a standard telephone can find telecommunications equipment that helps them stay connected to their friends, family, coworkers, neighbors, doctors, and more.”

If you are Deaf, DeafBlind, or hard of hearing, or have difficulty speaking, limited mobility, or cognitive difficulty, you could qualify for State-provided telecommunications equipment to independently make or receive calls. Visit **MDMAT.org** to view qualification details, browse a sampling of available equipment, or to apply for a device.



**You can watch the MAT program’s full DelmarvaLife interview on the Maryland Relay Facebook page at [Facebook.com/MarylandRelay711](https://www.facebook.com/MarylandRelay711).**

## Members of Maryland Relay's Outreach Team Visit Local Libraries

Outreach Coordinator Rebecca Miller set out on a mission to educate more community members about Maryland Relay's communication services and solutions through a traveling library series. From January through March 2023, Rebecca visited the following local branches of the Baltimore County Public Library:

- Owings Mills Branch
- White Marsh Branch
- North Point Branch
- Arbutus Branch

"It was a pleasure to partner with the Baltimore County Public Library to bring these outreach presentations to library supporters and frequent visitors," shares Rebecca. "So many people go to the library to learn more, develop their skills, and broaden their horizons. We want to make sure we're always providing as many people as possible with the communication resources needed to live an independent and thriving life—and we did just that through our Maryland Relay library series."

**If you'd like Maryland Relay to visit your local library or community organization, please complete our online inquiry form, found at [MDRelay.org](https://MDRelay.org), or call 800-552-7724, 410-767-6960 (Voice/TTY), or 443-453-5970 (Video Phone) and ask to speak to an outreach coordinator.**





## Health, History, and Holidays to Acknowledge this Summer

Summer has finally arrived! While you mark your calendars with upcoming family vacations and fun outings, don't forget to add these important observances to the months of June and July.

### DeafBlind Awareness Week

June 27 is not only Helen Keller's birthday, but also the beginning of DeafBlind Awareness Week. From June 27 through July 3, Maryland Relay will join members of the DeafBlind community, as well as their friends and family, to celebrate and raise awareness for those who have combined vision and hearing loss. Did you know the MAT program offers a Communication Facilitator (CF) service to assist those who are DeafBlind? Now might be the perfect time to learn more about the CF service and how it helps people who are DeafBlind easily make calls and keep in touch with family, friends, colleagues, and businesses. Visit [doit.maryland.gov/mdrelay/Pages/CommunicationFacilitatorService.aspx](https://doit.maryland.gov/mdrelay/Pages/CommunicationFacilitatorService.aspx) to learn more about the MAT-administered CF service.

### National Dysphagia Awareness Month

Did you know Maryland Relay and the MAT program also provide services and equipment to help individuals who have difficulty speaking stay connected? Many people who have dysphagia—which is the inability or trouble to swallow—also experience difficulty communicating. With June being National Dysphagia Month, it wouldn't hurt to spend some time educating yourself about this disorder and sharing some helpful resources with your loved ones on how to better support those with dysphagia. Visit [NFOSD.org](https://NFOSD.org) for more information about dysphagia, and visit [MDMAT.org](https://MDMAT.org) to see what types of equipment are available to ensure people who have mild to moderate speaking difficulties can independently make and receive calls.

### Disability Pride Month

Since 1990, we've recognized the significance of the signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in July, but we also celebrate Disability Pride Month! You can get involved by amplifying and uplifting members of the Disability community by sharing their experiences—including their triumphs and tribulations—to not only increase awareness and visibility, but to make our world a kinder, more accessible, and more inclusive place.

**Want to help Maryland Relay spread awareness about these communities this summer?  
Visit our social media pages and reshare our content!**

[Facebook.com/MarylandRelay711](https://Facebook.com/MarylandRelay711) | [Instagram.com/MDRelay711](https://Instagram.com/MDRelay711) | [Twitter.com/MDRelay711](https://Twitter.com/MDRelay711)

## Popular Shows Shine the Spotlight on the Deaf Community

Are you a fan of pop culture? If so, you might be familiar with some of the TV shows that have recently been attracting heavy media attention due to the incredible actors and actresses from the Deaf community and the increase of ASL on viewers' screens.

### Ginny and Georgia

Season two of *Ginny and Georgia*, one of Netflix's hit TV shows, premiered on the popular streaming platform on January 5, 2023, and skyrocketed to number one for four weeks in the United States. Two of the show's main characters, twins Marcus and Maxine Baker, are raised by their mother, Ellen, and their father, Clint. Clint is Deaf in the show and in real life, and his character is portrayed by actor Chris Kenopic. All of the scenes that feature the Bakers show conversations in ASL, representing real families who use ASL each day to communicate with their loved ones.

### Dancing with the Stars

Any *Dancing with the Stars* enthusiasts out there? The show's 31st season streamed on Disney+ from September 19, 2022, to November 21, 2022, and featured a range of celebrity icons competing with professional dancing partners for the Mirror Ball trophy. One of the contestants, Daniel Durant, is an actor from the Deaf community who is most known for his role in the Academy Award-winning film, *CODA*. Throughout the season, Daniel shared what it was like to be Deaf and compete as a dancer on the show. Daniel and his partner, Britt Stewart, ended up placing fifth out of 18 couples.

### The Last of Us

A Maryland resident and 10-year-old hockey player, Keivonn Montreal Woodard, had his big acting debut in HBO Max's hit series, *The Last of Us*, which premiered on January 15, 2023. In the show, Keivonn portrays the character Sam Burrell who is Deaf, and Keivonn is also Deaf in real life. In addition to acting, he plays for the Bowie Hockey Club Under-10 team with an ASL interpreter that's supported by a grant from the Washington Capitals and Monumental Sports & Entertainment Foundation's Capital Impact Fund. The hockey player-turned-actor was able to meet and play with members of the Capitals in March of 2023.





## Could You Benefit from Relay Conference Captioning (RCC)?

Imagine being on a conference call for work and not being able to follow the conversation because you're living with hearing loss and accessibility features aren't available for the meeting. This is a real occurrence for many people in the world who are Deaf or hard of hearing.

With RCC, individuals with hearing loss can communicate effectively during conference calls, virtual meetings, or webinars. The free service, offered exclusively from Maryland Relay to Maryland residents provides real-time captioning of what all participants are saying during conference calls, virtual meetings, or webinars—allowing the user to read the text on an internet-connected device. The captioning is made possible through the use of Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) service.



**If you need to schedule or request a captionist for your next conference call, virtual meeting, or webinar, please visit [MarylandRCC.com](https://MarylandRCC.com) and submit the RCC Scheduling Request Form 48 hours in advance of the call.**

### Here's What You Need to Know About RCC and How It Works:

- No special software is required to use RCC; however, you must have access to a computer or mobile device that has internet connection to view the link where your text conversation will appear.
- Using a method such as a conference call bridge, your captionist will listen to the audio portion of the conference call, virtual meeting, or webinar and type real-time text, which displays seconds after someone has spoken.
- At any time, you may scroll up and view what has been said during the conversation by any member of the conference call, virtual meeting, or webinar
- Once the call is completed, you have the ability to copy or print the transcript that was produced by the captionist during the call.
- To guarantee RCC service, you must submit the **RCC Scheduling Request Form** 48 hours in advance of the call—which can be found at **[MarylandRCC.com](https://MarylandRCC.com)**.

*RCC is for individual use only.*

# Maryland Relay Sponsors an All-Star Basketball Weekend



*The Maryland Crossover women's basketball team cheers from the court.*

*Maryland Relay Manager Travis Dougherty proudly displays the Maryland Relay-sponsored jersey worn by the coach.*

On the weekend of March 11, 2023, the women's Maryland Crossover basketball team dominated the 30th Annual Women's Regional Basketball Tournament. Fans watched and cheered from the sidelines as the local team won their second game of the tournament sending them into the finals. Donning their Maryland Relay-sponsored jerseys, the women's Maryland Crossover team defeated their opponents in the championship game with a final score of 66 to 52.

Hosted by the Eastern Athletic Association of the Deaf (EAAD) and the Maryland Deaf Community Center, the 75th Men's + 30th Women's Regional Basketball Tournament, also sponsored by Maryland Relay, was held at the Maryland School for the Deaf in Frederick, Maryland. It was a successful turnout with 15 teams competing in the men's and women's brackets.

From the stands, Maryland Relay Manager Travis Dougherty cheered for the Maryland Crossover team as they competed on the court.

"We were super excited to sponsor the tournament and the Maryland Crossover team, shared Travis after the championship game.



"The tournament could not have gone any better. It was a great time to watch everyone get on the court and have fun. We always love when we get to sponsor and give back in any way to our local communities."

We'd also like to congratulate the Maryland Crossover team for taking home the trophy at the United States of America Deaf Basketball 2023 National Tournament, which was held on April 27 - 29 at the St. John Fisher University Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Athletic Center Fieldhouse in Rochester, NY.

**Want to partner with Maryland Relay in your next community event?**

**Visit [MDRelay.org](https://MDRelay.org) to learn more or e-mail us at [MoreInfo@MDRelay.org](mailto:MoreInfo@MDRelay.org) to get connected.**



see  
beyond  
festival



Photos compliments of  
The Maryland School for  
the Blind.

Center: Kevin Steffy, Maryland  
Accessible Telecommunications  
Manager, attends MSB's 2nd  
Annual See Beyond Festival.



The Maryland School for the Blind

## Maryland Relay Sponsors The Maryland School for the Blind's 2nd Annual See Beyond Festival

The Maryland School for the Blind (MSB)—located in Baltimore, Maryland—serves a range of students from birth until age 21 who are blind or have low vision. The school caters to students in all of the Maryland counties and provides a multitude of programs and services to assist their students, their students' families and friends, and even the general public.

Since 2022, MSB has hosted a one-of-a-kind, community-wide event called the See Beyond Festival that creates a deeper understanding of what life is like for people who are blind or have low vision. The unique event is free and welcomes Maryland families to experience a new sense of fun by participating in activities and challenges while wearing light-blocking eyeshades. This year, Maryland Relay had the privilege of sponsoring the 2023 See Beyond Festival on Saturday, April 29.

"Nearly 3,000 people showed up to the MSB campus to show their support for their friends, family, and neighbors who are blind or low vision," shares David Bahar, director of TAM. "Maryland Relay is proud to sponsor such a special event that not only brings the community together but promotes accessibility and inclusion in such a fun way."

Attendees of this year's festival had the opportunity to participate in blind sports, blind taste and scent tests, and other hands-on challenges without the use of their sight. In addition to the blindfolded activities, families enjoyed delicious food from local restaurants, shopped at the Marker's Market and Vendor Fair, and danced to live music from the Sound Storm Band, Broken Stil, and MSB's student drummers.

**Visit [SeeBeyondFestival.org](https://SeeBeyondFestival.org) to see how you can support next year's event.**

**To learn more about MSB, check out their website at [MarylandSchoolForTheBlind.org](https://MarylandSchoolForTheBlind.org).**

## Captioned Telephone Communication Mad Lib

Individuals who have difficulty hearing over the phone can enjoy clearer conversations with Captioned Telephone. A Captioned Telephone works just like a standard phone, with one important difference: it displays word-for-word captions of what the other person says throughout the conversation.

**Mad Lib Instructions:** Find a friend or family member and help complete this Maryland Relay-facilitated call between a Captioned Telephone user, Martha, and her friend, Betty.

Martha, a Captioned Telephone user, dials her friend, Betty, on her Captioned Telephone.

Martha: Hi Betty! This is Martha. I hope you're doing well. I was calling to see if you wanted to visit the \_\_\_\_\_ with me today.  
[noun, place]

Betty: Martha, I would love to. I always enjoy spending time with you. You're such a \_\_\_\_\_ friend.  
[adjective]

Martha: Thanks, Betty! Make sure to bring a \_\_\_\_\_ with you. It gets pretty \_\_\_\_\_ at the \_\_\_\_\_.  
[noun, thing] [adjective] [noun, place]

Betty: Will do! Thanks for the reminder. Do you think we will see \_\_\_\_\_ at the \_\_\_\_\_ ?  
[proper noun, person] [noun, place]

Martha: Maybe! I'm not sure. By the way, I'm packing a \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ for our trip to the \_\_\_\_\_ today.  
[noun, thing] [noun, thing] [noun, place]

Betty: Wonderful! I can't wait. I'm packing everything now and will \_\_\_\_\_ you when I am ready to go.  
[verb, present tense]

Martha: Great, sounds like a plan. I'll pick you up once you're ready. I'm so \_\_\_\_\_ to spend time with you! Talk soon!  
[adjective, feeling]

Betty: Sounds good to me. Bye, Martha!

Martha: Bye, Betty!





# Telecommunications Access of Maryland

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 [Facebook.com/MarylandRelay711](https://www.facebook.com/MarylandRelay711)

 [Twitter.com/MDRelay711](https://twitter.com/MDRelay711)

 [Instagram.com/MDRelay711](https://www.instagram.com/MDRelay711)

## Introducing Hamilton Relay's New Community Leader Award

For over 10 years, Hamilton Relay has recognized outstanding leaders in the Maryland Relay community, as well as in other states throughout the U.S. where their services are provided. Recently, they've announced that they've combined their Deaf Community Leader Award and Better Hearing and Speech Month Recognition Award into one honor—the Hamilton Relay Community Leader Award.

This new accolade allows more individuals who are Deaf, DeafBlind, late-deafened, hard of hearing, or have difficulty speaking to be nominated for this recognition. In addition to individual nominations, Maryland organizations that serve these communities will also be considered. If you know a Marylander or Maryland-based organization that's committed to volunteerism, leadership, advocacy, and bettering the community

around them, please consider nominating the individual or group for the 2023 Hamilton Relay Community Leader Award.

Make your nomination before **July 14, 2023!**  
**Visit [HamiltonRelay.com/CommunityLeader](https://www.HamiltonRelay.com/CommunityLeader)**  
to complete your submission honoring an inspirational individual or organization in our great state.

